



PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. Offers Avian Flu Assistance for Use in North Korea

The following is the text of a statement made on April 5, 2005, by U.S. Department of State Spokesman Richard Boucher.

The U.S. Government is concerned about the ongoing avian influenza, or bird flu, outbreak in Asia and its potential for becoming a human flu pandemic. From January 2004 until now, outbreaks of bird flu—formally known as Avian Influenza H5N1—have been confirmed among poultry in Vietnam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, South Korea, and Thailand. North Korea recently reported incidents of avian influenza, but the influenza strain remains uncertain.

Avian influenza has killed nearly 50 people in Southeast Asia and resulted in the deaths of millions of poultry. Current influenza treatments for human cases are unproven and medical professionals warn of a global pandemic if the virus develops the capacity to be transmitted easily from person to person. However, the vast majority of the known human cases have resulted from direct contact with poultry and there is only limited evidence to suggest human-to-human transmission.

The United States is collaborating closely with the World Health Organization, the World Organization for Animal Health, and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations to address the situation. These organizations, working with their members, are offering technical assistance to affected countries throughout the region. At the request of the World Health Organization, the United States provided three test kits to the organization for use in North Korea to determine what influenza viruses are causing outbreaks in poultry and to test if humans have been infected. The U.S. Government approved the release of the kits on a humanitarian basis to help the people of North Korea.

The United States is also offering bilateral technical and epidemiological help to select countries through the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Over the past year, the Department of Health and Human Services provided over \$5.5 million in technical help and grants to the region and the World Health Organization for influenza pandemic preparedness, including emergency support

in the form of experts and laboratory reagents from its Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Department of Agriculture, with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, is organizing a symposium on avian influenza response, preparedness, and human health emergency in San Francisco in July. The U.S. Agency for International Development has sent stocks of personal protective equipment to the region to be used if an outbreak begins to spread rapidly.

To help protect Americans at home and abroad, the State Department has issued a Fact Sheet informing the public about Avian Influenza. For more information go to <http://www.state.gov/g/oes/avianflu/>